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ABSTRACT

This document and its accompanying 14-minute open-captioned videotape summarize legal issues related to the employment of people with disabilities, methods for creating inclusive programs, accommodation strategies, and tips for working with individuals with disabilities. The section on legal issues considers requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and provides the ADA definition of a person with a disability. Guidelines for creating an inclusive career development program address design and physical environment, printed and electronic resources, recruitment, and accessibility of events. Ten suggestions for working with persons with disabilities are offered, such as recognizing that the person with the disability is the best resource when determining appropriate modifications. Suggestions for career counselors working with employers include ways to identify possible accommodation strategies. Eight organizational resources are identified with a brief explanation of their services. (DB)

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"Access to the Future : Preparing College Students With Disabilities for Careers"

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Access to the Future: Preparing College Students With Disabilities for Careers

DO-IT

Making Campus Career Development Programs Inclusive

The number of students with disabilities entering and completing post-secondary education has increased dramatically in the last decade, yet people with disabilities are still underrepresented in the employment arena. A 1994 poll commissioned by the National Organization on Disability shows that only twenty-nine percent of those with disabilities of working age are employed full- or part-time as compared to seventy-nine percent of those without disabilities. Of the group of people with disabilities, seventy-two percent reported they would like to be employed.

Barriers to employment include lack of adequate support systems; little access to successful role models; lack of access to technology that can increase independence and productivity; and, most significantly, low expectations on the part of people with whom they interact.

Participation in work-based learning experiences, such as internships and cooperative education activities, can be integral to success after graduation. All students benefit from the opportunities work-based learning affords to network with potential employers, explore career options, apply skills learned in the classroom, and use specialized facilities not available on campus. However, for students with disabilities, the benefits of internships and other work experiences may be even greater than for their non-disabled peers. Students with disabilities face unique challenges as they transition to employment. Like other students, they need to meet the specific requirements of their desired jobs. Unlike other students, they must be aware of accommodation strategies for specific situations and also know how to appropriately disclose and discuss their disabilities as they relate to the performance of specific job tasks. Work-based learning experiences allow students to develop methods for determining accommodations and practice disclosing and discussing their disabilities.

Although the number of students with disabilities entering and completing post-secondary education has been increasing in recent years, students with disabilities access campus work-based learning programs at a lower rate than their non-disabled peers. This publication is designed to help career services, internship, cooperative education, service learning, and other work-based learning offices better integrate students with disabilities into their programs and work experience opportunities. It summarizes legal issues related to the employment of people with disabilities, methods for creating inclusive programs, accommodation strategies, and tips for working with individuals with disabilities.

Legal Issues

In 1990, President George Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law. The law states that "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of a public entity." The ADA reinforces and extends the precedent set forth by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This legislation mandates that colleges and universities provide equal access to programs and services for students with and without disabilities, and, like employers, career development programs are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified participants with disabilities.

EC 308821

However, employers and career development professionals are not required to guess or initiate a discussion about appropriate accommodations. Instead, the student or employee with a disability is required to request accommodations.

The ADA defines a person with a disability as someone who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, including walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.
- Has a record of such an impairment.
- Is regarded as having such an impairment.

Cerebral Palsy, specific learning disabilities, Muscular Dystrophy, AIDS, head injuries, and hearing and visual impairments are some, but not all, of the disabilities covered by this legislation.

People with conditions of the same name often have very different abilities and challenges. An accommodation is necessary only when a disability impedes the performance of a specific academic or employment task. The ADA requires that an employer provide a reasonable accommodation that will allow a qualified applicant or employee to perform the essential functions of the position. A qualified applicant or employee with a disability is a person who, with or without reasonable accommodations, can perform the essential functions of the job in question. Reasonable accommodations may include the provision of a sign language interpreter for job interviews, staff meetings, and training sessions; spell-check software; or a modification to the physical layout of the work site to make it possible for a person with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job.

Employers are not required to make an accommodation if it causes an undue hardship. An undue hardship is an action that requires significant difficulty or expense in relation to the size of the employer, the resources available, and the nature of the operation. Rarely is an accommodation so costly that undue hardship can be claimed. Accommodations often cost less than anticipated. The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a toll-free service that advises employers and employees about job accommodations, reports that fifty-one percent of all accommodations cost less than five-hundred dollars.

Inquiries about disabilities and medical conditions may not be made prior to a job offer. Employers are only allowed to ask applicants questions related to their ability to perform specific job functions. For example, if a student is applying to be an intern Web designer, the employer may ask about her ability to meet deadlines, use computer software, and perform specific job tasks.

College career development professionals, like employers, are not allowed to ask the student if she has a disability. Even if she volunteers information related to her disability to a career counselor or work-based learning coordinator, staff is not allowed to talk about her disability with an employer unless she has given written permission to do so. Since potential clients may have disabilities that they do not disclose to you, it is a good idea to offer disability-related service information to all students who access your programs.

Creating an Inclusive Career Development Program

The following guidelines will help you create an environment that fully includes students with disabilities.

Design and Physical Environment

Organizations typically design their services, facilities, and materials for the average user. "Universal design" refers to a more inclusive approach whereby facilities, programs, and

materials are created for users with a broad range of abilities and disabilities. It is important to remember that your clients may have learning, visual, hearing, speech, or mobility impairments.

Designing a career center or cooperative education program that is accessible to all potential users begins with the physical environment. To ensure accessibility, make sure:

1. Doorway openings are at least thirty-two inches wide and doorway thresholds are no higher than one half inch.
2. Aisles are kept wide and clear for wheelchair users.
3. Protruding objects and clutter are removed or minimalized for the safety of program participants who are blind or visually impaired.
4. All levels of the facility are connected by an accessible route of travel.
5. Ramps and/or elevators are provided as an alternative to stairs.
6. Signs directing customers to materials, services, and restrooms are marked in large print.

Printed and Electronic Resources

Some students may require brochures, applications, and company materials in Braille, large print, or on disk or tape. It is important to have a system in place to procure printed materials in alternative formats. The campus office responsible for providing academic accommodations to students may be able to help you determine the most efficient way to produce your materials in alternative formats when requested.

If your office provides Web-based or other electronic resources, make sure to employ universal design guidelines to assure access to students with disabilities. The use of multimedia materials creates the biggest access challenge. For blind students, critical information provided in graphic form should be duplicated in a text format so that it can be read by speech output systems. For deaf students audio output must be captioned or transcribed.

Recruiting

Many students with disabilities see internships and cooperative education experiences as optional program components that are not designed for them. To increase their participation, it may be necessary to directly market your programs to students with disabilities. The office that serves students with disabilities at your institution may be your best resource. They will not be able to give you the names of the students they serve, however many will have established mechanisms for advertising your services and activities to their clients. Provide this office with copies of your informational publications so that they can assist you in recruiting students with disabilities by posting and distributing your materials. They may be able to pass out program information to new students during orientation meetings and intake interviews. A ten-minute introduction to your services during an orientation will alert some students to the importance of participating in work-based learning experiences. The disabled student services office may also be aware of student groups that would welcome a presentation from your office staff.

Events

Campus career development and cooperative education programs often host presentations, career fairs/exhibits, and interviews between students and employers. Design these activities so that they are accessible to all students, including students with disabilities. Although you are required to provide reasonable accommodations to participants with disabilities, you are not expected to guess what accommodations will be needed. It is each student's responsibility to request an accommodation in advance. Event announcements and publications should tell participants how to request disability-related accommodations.

Examples of potential accommodation requests include:

- A wheelchair accessible career fair location.
- The provision of a sign language interpreter for an on-campus job interview.
- Braille or large print handouts.
- An FM amplification system that will allow a person with a hearing impairment to hear a speaker.

In some cases, it will be necessary for the institution to provide the accommodation. In others, the employer will do so. For example, a student who is deaf may require the provision of a sign language interpreter during an on-campus employment interview. The student may make this request to her career counselor. However, since the employer is conducting interviews for recruiting purposes, it is reasonable that the employer pay for the interpreter. Career counselors should work with a student to determine the best way to inform the employer of an accommodation request. Career counselors must have written permission from a student before disclosing his disability to a potential employer.

Working with Students with Disabilities

One of the most common barriers to academic and career achievement for students with disabilities is low expectations on the part of those with whom they interact. Maintain high expectations for participants with disabilities. Expect that they will succeed. Career counselors, cooperative education staff, internship coordinators, and employers can help students with disabilities develop and accomplish their goals by following these suggestions.

- Consider the person with the disability your best resource when determining appropriate accommodations.
- Make no assumptions. Most likely, the student has a full life and has learned to positively meet the challenges posed by the disability.
- Speak directly to a person and focus on his or her abilities rather than his or her disability.
- People with disabilities have the same range of likes and dislikes as those who are not disabled. Talk about things you talk about with other students. Use the same vocal strength and intonation.
- If you are feeling uncomfortable about a situation, let the person who has the disability know.
- Be sure expectations such as job performance, behavior, and dress are clearly defined and that they are met.
- If a person appears to be having difficulty at a task, ask if, and how, you may help.
- Avoid labels for groups of people with disabilities, such as "the blind." Instead, say "people who are blind."
- Avoid emotionally driven descriptions such as "crippled," "confined to a wheelchair," "stricken with," or "wheelchair-bound." Instead, simply be descriptive, such as "she uses a wheelchair."
- Avoid euphemisms to describe disabilities. Terms such as "differently-abled," and "physically-challenged," are considered by many to be condescending. They reinforce the idea that disabilities can't be dealt with in a straightforward manner.

Working with Employers

Many employers are aware of the ADA and are interested in employing students with disabilities. Career counselors, cooperative education staff, and internship coordinators can work with employers to make successful placements for students with disabilities. The following suggestions may assist you in working with employers as you place students with disabilities.

- Inform employers that you work with all students on your campus, including students with disabilities.
- Assist employers with procuring materials in alternative formats.

- Provide employers with information on creating accessible Web pages and other electronic resources.
- Alert employers to community resources that can assist them and their employees with determining appropriate accommodations.

Accommodation Strategies
Work-based learning offers an opportunity for students and employers to determine the best accommodations in a particular work environment. Many times, the necessary accommodation will be obvious. Other situations will require some research. As you work with students and employers to choose reasonable accommodations, ask the following four questions.

1. **What does the task or assignment require?** Break down all of the components of the job. This will help you to determine the best way to fully include an employee with a disability.
2. **What physical, sensory and cognitive skills are needed?** Compare the skills required to complete a task to the skills of the potential employee. Does a modification need to be made in order for the person to be successful?
3. **What components of the task require accommodation?** Check with the employee to see which aspects he or she feels require accommodations.
4. **What accommodation options exist?** The employee is your best resource. If he or she requires assistance with answering this question, be sure to access campus and community resources.

Additional Resources

There are many resources on campus and in your community to help you as you fully include students with disabilities in your programs. The following list of organizations and services will help you get started:

Disabled Student Services (DSS)/ACCESS office
Most college campuses have an office that works with students with disabilities and faculty in determining and providing appropriate academic accommodations. They may also be able to assist you as you create an accessible program and determine accommodations for your participants. Check your campus directory for contact information at your institution.

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology)
206-685-DOIT (voice/TTY)
888-972-DOIT (voice/TTY), WA
509-328-9331 (voice/TTY), Spokane
206-221-4171 (FAX)
doit@u.washington.edu
http://www.washington.edu/doit/
DO-IT works to increase the successful participation of people with disabilities in academic programs and careers. DO-IT uses adaptive technology and the Internet to maximize independence, productivity and participation. It provides instructional materials (printed, videotaped and WWW) regarding the transition from high school to college and school to work, as well as guidelines for designing accessible Web pages.

ENTRY POINT!, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
202-326-6649 (voice/TTY)
202-371-9849 (FAX)
http://www.entrypoint.org/
ENTRY POINT! is an internship program for college students with disabilities majoring in computer science, engineering, mathematics, or physical science. Contact ENTRY POINT! to inquire about becoming a part of this program.

Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities/President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD)
202-376-6200
202-376-6353 (TTY)
info@pcepd.gov
http://www50.pcepd.gov/

State committees serve as liaisons to the President's Committee. State committee contact information can be found in your telphone directory, or by accessing the PCEPD web site.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
800-526-7236 (voice/TTY)
jan@jan.icdi.wvu.edu
http://www.janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/
JAN, a toll-free service, assists businesses and individuals with disabilities with questions about accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA)
202-205-8719
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA/
RSA oversees programs that help people with disabilities gain employment, such as state vocational rehabilitation offices. State and local vocational rehabilitation programs are listed in your telephone directory.

Workforce Recruitment Program
800-232-9675 (voice/TTY)
http://www50.pcepd.gov/pcepd/projects/workforc.htm
The Workforce Recruitment Program is a joint effort between the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, The Department of Defense, and the Job Accommodation Network. Employers may request access to a database of pre-screened college-age applicants with disabilities available for summer or permanent employment.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
800-669-4000
202-663-4494 (TTY)
http://www.eeoc.gov/
The EEOC provides enforcement guidance on reasonable accommodation and undue hardship under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Grants and gifts fund DO-IT publications, videotapes, and programs to support the academic and career success of people with disabilities. Contribute today by sending a check to DO-IT, Box 355670, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195-5670.

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About DO-IT

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